

April 2024 Newsletter

Annual General Meeting (AGM) / Next Talk - Monday 15th April

We hope that you will be able to join us for our brief Annual General Meeting (AGM) being held on Monday 15th April at Colwall Village Hall. Doors open at 19:00 and the AGM starts at 19:30.

If you are a Colwall Village Society (CVS) member you will receive a calling notice for the AGM by post or email.

The AGM will be followed by a talk on

Geological Inspirations - Landscapes, rocks and fossils of Abberley and Malvern Hills Geopark

Colwall sits in the centre of the Abberley and Malvern Hills Geopark which was set up 20 years ago to celebrate the geology and landscape of the area. You may have seen the footpath signs for the Geopark Way which runs through the village.

Our speaker is Georgia Jacobs who will give us an overview of the Geopark and Colwall's place in it. Georgia is also an artist whose textile art is influenced by the geology of the park. She will be bringing along some examples of her work and explaining how they are influenced by the geology of the Geopark.



Membership of Colwall Village Society

Annual CVS membership subscriptions for 2024/25 were due for renewal on 1st April 2024. The subscription for Members who joined after 1st November 2023 will continue to run until 31st March 2025 without any further sum being payable. Otherwise, the annual subscription for 2024/25 is £5 per person and can be paid at the AGM or via the methods detailed in the membership renewal notice.

Thank you to those of you who have already paid your membership subscription for 2024/25, and for your continuing support. It is very much appreciated.

Colwall Home Front Project

CVS is running a project to add to our records of life in Colwall during the 2nd World War. The aim of the project is to record memories and photographs for future generations, as well as having an event in 2025 which will celebrate Colwall's Home Front along with an accompanying booklet.

Don't let the stories of the 1940s fade away. Please contact us if you have memories or photographs that you would like to share. We are also looking for people to form a small group who would piece together the stories and do some further research.

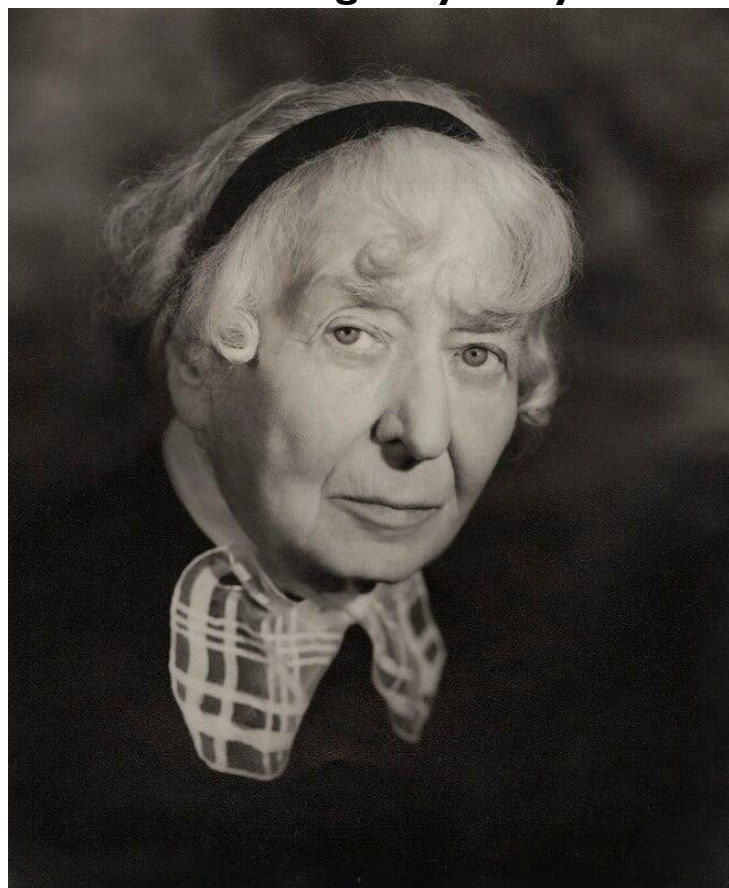
Margaret Matthews

CVS is very sad to learn of the death of Margaret Matthews on February 11th, 2024.

Margaret had been a member of the CVS committee for many years. Initially she was membership secretary and kept meticulous records of members and subscription payments ('old style' on paper.) In the pre-email days she organised the distribution of newsletters and other communications through a band of helpers using recycled envelopes and typed up distribution lists. Later, she also took on the role of treasurer and kept the Society's financial books in the same precise manner. Some years ago, she was ill for a few months and the person who took over her role for that period commented that her records were so exact and clear that it was very easy to keep them up to date until she returned. Margaret only gave up these two roles relatively recently and remained on the committee until her death.

She was a strong supporter of the CVS and a fine lady. We shall miss her...

Dame Laura Knight by Andy Ball



Amongst the many famous people associated with Colwall is the artist Dame Laura Knight (1877-1970). Born in Long Eaton in Derbyshire she emerged from a disadvantaged childhood to become one of the pre-eminent artists of the 20th century, becoming a Dame in 1929 and the first woman to be elected a Royal Academician in 1936.

Local historian Heather Whatley has written an excellent book *Laura Knight In the Malverns* that details her associations with the area and Heather will be doing a talk for Colwall Village Society later this year. CVS are currently using Heather's book as the starting point for further research into the Knights' associations with Colwall which we will publish on the CVS website. This is proving to be a fascinating part of our local history, a brief introduction to which is detailed below.

Laura, and her artist husband Harold, had been introduced to the Malvern Hills area by Barry Jackson, the theatre director and entrepreneur. He lived at the house called 'Black Hill' and subsequently at 'Hambleton' both in Colwall parish, on the Malvern Hills close to the

Malvern Hills Hotel. At his invitation the Knights visited Malvern annually during the 1930s to attend the Malvern Summer Festivals. With the onset of the Second World War Laura and Harold temporarily moved from London to stay locally – at first at the British Camp Hotel (now the Malvern Hills Hotel) and then, in around 1943-44, they settled at the (Colwall) Park Hotel.

The Knights socialised with local eminent people including Barry Jackson, the Cadburys from 'Wynds Point' and the Nicholls from 'Winds Acre'. Harold and Laura utilized several temporary local studios in Colwall including at the (Colwall) Park Hotel (commemorated by a green plaque previously provided by CVS) and the garage at 'Winds Acre'.

Laura was famous for painting images of people from areas of society including those from the theatre, ballet, circus and gypsy communities, previously ignored by other artists. In Colwall she produced some very fine work notably local landscapes such as *Harvest* (1939) which features on the front cover of the *Victoria County History* -

Colwall book, and studies of farming activities like ploughing and sheep shearing. She was a frequent visitor to the local gypsy encampment based at the former Colwall Brick and Tile Works and was accepted as someone who readily fitted into all walks of village life, in a natural and unassuming way, despite being famous.

During the war years her national reputation was further enhanced by her incredibly realistic and detailed studies of war workers – especially women. Her work - *Ruby Loftus screwing a Breech-ring* (1943) - was particularly popular - accurately illustrating how women could readily do work previously considered to be solely a male domain. In Colwall Laura's war-study work included images of the work being done to test prefabricated concrete railway sleepers at part of the Dowsett-Mackay Company facility based on and adjoining the Colwall Park Racecourse. This resulted in the production of a very large sized painting titled *The Test* which we are currently researching. At present we only have a black and white photograph of this painting and we would really like to find out where it now is.



After the war Laura spent several weeks in Germany recording the Nuremburg war trials resulting, in 1946, in her painting *The Dock, Nuremberg* - a brilliantly composed and executed piece of work. The poverty and destruction of post-war Germany, together with the harrowing details exposed by the trials, seems to have had an intense effect upon Laura and she felt the need to take a break part way through the proceedings to return to Harold in Colwall to recharge her batteries both mentally and physically.

The Knights developed an enduring fondness for the Malvern Hills, and for Colwall, and during the 1950s Laura divided her time between London and this area. Harold passed away in 1961 at the Colwall Park Hotel, and Laura died in London in 1970.

In 1964 she had written nostalgically about the Malvern Hills area - *'I long for another glimpse of the top of the Beacon, of the sparkle of the Bristol Channel at midday. I long to hold a sketchbook and note down the ever-changing effects made by the weather on those open stretches of English country and perhaps, above all I long to spend many hours with the many dear friends Harold and I had the good fortune to make amidst that great beauty.'*

This is only a brief introduction to Dame Laura Knight, and fortuitously there is currently a superb art exhibition at Worcester Museum and Art Gallery that shows a good selection of her work. Titled *Dame Laura Knight – I Paint Today* - it's an excellent insight to her life and artistry. The exhibition runs until Sunday 30th June and is well worth a visit.

More details are available at <https://www.museumsworcestershire.org.uk/events/dame-laura-knight-i-paint-today/>

Future CVS Events

Some dates for your diary...

Saturday 11th May - Colwall Library 10:00-12:00 - A display of photographs of Colwall's golf courses

Monday 17th June - Colwall Village Hall 19.30 - Talk - *Colwall: A Special Place* by James Ferguson

Monday 21st October - Colwall Village Hall 19.30 - Talk on Dame Laura Knight by Heather Whatley



Colwall Railway Station Heritage Information Board

Those of you who are regular users of our much-cherished railway station may already have noticed this new addition to the station furniture. This is part of the Parish Council led initiative to highlight and celebrate what was once an extensive and locally important railway station with goods yard during the 20th century.

The handsome heritage display board provides information about the history of the railway and promotes the CVS publication *Colwall and the Railway*. It also provides information on the *Colwall Heritage Trail Walk* leaflet and features a series of local images from that publication, thus hopefully tempting visitors to the village to explore further.

CVS, Colwall Parish Council, Rail and Bus for Herefordshire (RBfH), and West Midlands Railway all worked together to get the heritage display board produced.

As mentioned in our last newsletter, this project was initiated and coordinated by Gareth Calan Davies from RBfH who passed away at the end of 2023.

Neolithic Axehead Find

The ongoing roadworks in Colwall are the probable cause of the unearthing of what we believe to be a Neolithic stone axehead. This artefact, likely to date from at least two millennia before the birth of Christ, was a chance find, spotted on a grass verge by local resident Carol Ashman when walking along Old Church Road near 'Kimberley House'.

Sadly, the axehead is broken, probably damaged when it was excavated from the roadway, but it is clearly a worked stone that has been shaped, ground, polished and sharpened. The exact type of stone is unknown, but it is a fine-grained rock of a light grey colour.

Stone axeheads of this period may have had a dual use as practical tools together with a ceremonial or status-related function. The axehead has been recorded with a draft record on the Portable Antiquities Scheme database, and it will be shown to the local Finds Liaison Officer for Herefordshire and Shropshire on the next available *Finds Recording Day* - when we hope to find out some more.



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